CLAIMS

1.   A method for distributing route guide information to be used when providing route guidance based upon information related to a recommended route from a start point to a

5   destination and exchanged between an information terminal and an information distribution center, wherein

the information distribution center executes steps of:

(1) receiving information indicating the start point and the destination from the information terminal;

10   (2) obtaining through a search calculation route guide information for a route from the start point to the destination; and

(3) splitting results of the search calculation and transmitting the results in installments to the information

15   terminal.

2.   A route guidance method for providing route guidance based upon information related to a recommended route from a start point to a destination and exchanged between an

20   information terminal and an information distribution center, wherein

the information terminal executes steps of:

(1) transmitting information indicating the start point and the destination to the information distribution center; and

25   and

(2) starting the route guidance upon receiving an installment of search calculation results for an area near the start point transmitted thereto by splitting results of a search calculation executed at the information distribution

5   center to obtain route guide information.

3.   A route guidance method for providing route guidance based upon information related to a recommended route from a start point to a destination and exchanged between an

10   information terminal and an information distribution center by executing in sequence steps (a) to (d) below, wherein:

(a) the information terminal transmits information indicating the start point and the destination to the information distribution center;

15   (b) the information distribution center obtains route guide information for a route from the start point to the destination by executing a search calculation;

(c) the information distribution center splits results of the search calculation and transmits the search calculation

20   results to the information terminal in installments; and

(d) the information terminal starts route guidance upon receiving, at least, a search calculation results installment corresponding to an area near the start point.

4.   A route guidance method for providing route guidance by causing an information terminal, which transmits information indicating a start point and a destination to an information distribution center, and the information

5   distribution center obtains route guide information for a route from the start point to the destination through a search calculation and transmits results of the search calculation to the information terminal in installments by splitting the search calculation results if a specific condition exists,

10   to execute in sequence steps (a) to (d) below, wherein:

(a) a user is informed of an estimated download time for downloading the search calculation results, determined based upon a physical quantity indicating a size of the search calculation results;

15   (b) the information terminal transmits to the information distribution center information indicating an instruction by the user that the information distribution center split the search calculation results and transmit the search calculation results in installments;

20   (c) upon receiving the information indicating the instruction by the user that the search calculation results be split and transmitted in installments, the information distribution center extracts search calculation results corresponding to an area near the start point from the search

calculation results and transmits the extracted search

calculation results; and

        (d) upon receiving the search calculation results

corresponding to the area near the start point, the information

5   terminal starts the route guidance.

5.   A route guidance method according to claim 4, wherein:

        the search calculation results include route

information of the route from the start point to the destination

10   and guide information used to indicate an advancing direction

or the like at each guide point on the route.

6.   A route guidance method according to claim 5, wherein:

        the search calculation results corresponding to the area

15   near the start point include at least guide information for

a block extending from the start point to a next guide point.

7.   A route guidance method according to any of claims 4

to 6, wherein:

20   the physical quantity indicates a data size of the guide

information or a number of guide points contained in the guide

information.

8.   A route guidance method according to any of claims 4

25   to 7, wherein:

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after starting the route guidance, the information terminal transmits a request to the information distribution center for remaining guide information.

5   9.   A route guidance method according to claim 8, wherein:
        the information terminal transmits a request to the information distribution center for the remaining guide information to be distributed in units each corresponding to a guide point; and
10   each time the request is received, the information distribution center transmits guide information extracted in a unit corresponding to a guide point to the information terminal.

15   10.   A route guidance method according to claim 3, wherein:
        when a state of communication between the information terminal and the information distribution center is poor, the information distribution center splits the search calculation results and transmits the search calculation results to the
20   information terminal in installments.

11.   A route guidance method according to claim 3, wherein:
        when a distance between the start point and the destination is equal to or greater than a predetermined value,
25   the information distribution center splits the search

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calculation results and transmits the search calculation results to the information terminal in installments.

12.   A route guidance method according to claim 3, wherein:

5   when a communication device with a data transmission speed equal to or lower than a predetermined value is connected to the information terminal, the information distribution center splits the search calculation results and transmits the search calculation results to the information terminal

10   in installments.

13.   A distribution center that distributes route guide information to be used to enable an information terminal to provide route guidance, which is obtained based upon

15   information related to a recommended route from a start point to a destination and exchanged with the information terminal, comprising:

a receiving means for receiving a route search request that a route from the start point to the destination be searched,

20   which is transmitted from the information terminal;

a search calculation means for obtaining route guide information for the route from the start point to the destination by executing a search calculation in response to the request;

an extraction means for extracting search calculation
results corresponding to an area near the start point from
the search calculation results obtained through the search
calculation executed by the search calculation means; and

5   a transmission means for first transmitting the results
extracted by the extraction means to the information terminal
and then transmitting remaining search calculation results
to the information terminal.

10   14.   An information terminal that provides route guidance
by exchanging information related to a recommended route from
a start point to a destination with an information distribution
center, comprising:
         a transmission/reception means for transmitting
15   information indicating the start point and the destination
to the information distribution center and receiving search
calculation results constituting route guide information
obtained through an arithmetic operation executed at the
information distribution center; and
20   a guidance starting means for starting the route guidance
upon receiving at least search results corresponding to an
area near the start point and constituting part of the route
guide information obtained through the arithmetic operation
executed at the information distribution center, split and
25   transmitted in installments.